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**PARALYSIS: A REVOLUTIONARY FORM OF WAR**

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## **Paralysis: A Revolutionary Form of War**

Since the beginning of recorded time, man has sought to impose his will on others. The act of violently imposing the collective will of a group upon another is what has become known as war. While Clausewitz's essence of war remains timeless, other theorists from Jomini to Mahan to Douhet to Mao focused their efforts on offering ways to improve existing forms of war. Each of these theorists operated in a paradigm relying on the accomplishment of sequential acts of violence --whether direct or indirect in nature--to accomplish the objective. This was the only manner in which they could address their linear world. In this paradigm, war took on the various forms of *attrition*, *annihilation*, and *disruption*. The unfolding transition from the industrial age to the age of information has opened a door to a new form of war, not based on sequential acts, but on acts operating in parallel. This new paradigm was previewed in small measure during the Gulf War and is much more than stealth technology, precision guided weapons, and rapid maneuver. *Paralysis* will fundamentally change the way future wars are waged. Those who can master its capabilities as well as understand its limitations will occupy the new high ground. This essay will analyze the evolving theory of war forms and apply Clausewitz's timeless principles regarding the essence of war to gain an appreciation of the revolutionary war form of paralysis.

**Sequential Attack** The paradigm of sequential attack yielded the three primary forms of war that still remain in use today. Each of these forms of war sought different approaches in defeating enemy forces. They were chosen based on relative military strength (actual and potential) as well as how much of that strength one was willing to commit towards obtaining a particular objective. War took on the form of annihilation when a capability existed to apply overwhelming force against

an adversary. This form of war sought to override much of Clausewitz's cautions on the nature of war by providing the means to overcome any uncertainty of battle. Its goal is to quickly compel the adversary to submit to your will. Some examples include the initial French victories under Napoleon, General Grant's strategy to end the American Civil War, and the Germans conception of operations at the beginning of World War II. Annihilation requires a commitment of a huge amount of resources that can place great burden on the victor. Initial success can also tend to take on a life of its own by expanding one's objectives and exceeding a logical culminating point. Additionally, devastating an opponent can also result in an inability to achieve a lasting and better state of peace. Annihilation is often thought of as an American way of war. Russell Weigley stated that, "Grant became the prophet of a strategy of annihilation in a new dimension, seeking the literal destruction of the enemy's armies as the means to victory."<sup>1</sup> The promise of a quick victory often failed and transformed into our next form of war.

A strategy of attrition generally occurs between forces of roughly equal capability. This can also occur when a stronger force exceeds its culminating point, or when one's level of commitment to the objective results in an inability to employ the means necessary to annihilate the adversary. Attrition seeks to wear down the opponent to a point that annihilation is possible, the adversary loses the ability to continue to resist, or his will erodes. This way of war is generally costly in terms of lives and treasure, and tends to be of long duration. Some examples include World War I, the Pacific aspects of World War II, some revolutionary wars, and the Iran-Iraq War. Sequential solutions to this form of war involve concentration, maneuver, mass, and attempts to seek an indirect approach. Most theorists on the conduct of war simply offered new sequential solutions to break the stalemate of attrition war. Attrition warfare often devastates the loser and makes the price of victory arguably higher than the value of the objective.

The sequential war form of disruption is applied when one side has insufficient means to engage the adversary, or when one's commitment to the objective does not warrant applying the necessary means. This form of war is usually waged as a result of relative weakness (physical or psychological). Disruption seeks to avoid military strength by avoiding engagement and inflicting small amounts of damage on an opponent. This form of war seeks to convince the opponent that the cost of success is not worth the objective. In time, the disrupting force might gain in strength and transition to another previously discussed form of war. Some examples include the American Revolution, aspects of the Vietnam War, and Mao's initial protracted war in China. Disruption usually requires a long term commitment and is most effective when the adversary is not totally committed towards the objective.

**Parallel Attack** The ends (political objective), ways (paralyzing the enemy), and means (capabilities and vulnerabilities) associated with parallel attack provide a useful way in which to understand its implications. Ultimately the political aim of war remains constant regardless of the form of war. In its basic construct, the idea of attaining the objective by paralyzing the enemy is not new. Clausewitz called the ideal form of war "the striking of blows everywhere at the same time"<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, Liddell Hart foresaw the importance of paralyzing an enemy to win wars at the lowest possible cost. He stated that, "It is thus more potent, as well as more economical to disarm the enemy than to attempt his destruction by hard fighting. A strategist should think in terms of paralysis, not killing"<sup>3</sup>. Hart further argued that, "Pressure on the government of a country may suffice to cancel all the resources at its command, so that the sword drops from a paralyzed hand"<sup>4</sup>. While parallel attack seeks to overwhelm the enemy's ability to defend everywhere, sequential attack allows the enemy an opportunity to defend from follow-on attacks at

specific--often predictable--locations. Parallel attack seeks to exploit the synergistic benefits of bringing down an entire system, as opposed to sequential attack that seeks to exploit achievements at the tactical level of war. The goal of parallel attack is to prevent an adversary from responding, while sequential attack seeks to exhaust the adversary through continuous efforts to erode his means to wage war.

Parallel attack was not an option to past commanders because they had to concentrate to defeat a weaker portion of the enemy force. Once a portion of the force was beaten in detail, the victorious commander could concentrate again and move on to attack another enemy weakness. This process is normally very time consuming and gives the adversary numerous opportunities to improve his situation. Ideas such as culminating point, campaign phasing, and our entire perspective regarding offensive versus defensive operations are results of the sequential paradigm.

Technological advances are rapidly approaching that will allow near simultaneous attack on virtually every enemy strategic target. This forces us to rethink ideas that, until now, have been fundamental to warfare. The Combined Bomber Offensive of World War II sought to achieve paralysis by using sequential attacks against Germany.<sup>5</sup> Vast amounts of resources were directed towards this aim. While this campaign fell far short of expectations for a variety of reasons, its greatest obstacle was the available technology. Yet, despite the relatively small numbers of targets selected, the inaccuracy of the platforms, and the sequential manner in which the campaign was prosecuted, the German system was unquestionably strained.<sup>6</sup> For the entire year of 1943, only 50 strikes against German strategic targets occurred. By contrast, the first 24 hours of Desert Storm saw over 150 strikes on Iraqi strategic targets.<sup>7</sup> The continuing exponential increase in technology will provide the commander with the means to simultaneously strike virtually every identifiable strategic target at the outset of hostilities.

The ways in which parallel attack could be applied require that the adversary be viewed in a completely different manner than he was viewed in the context of sequential attack. From a drug cartel, to an international terrorist ring, to a technologically advanced nation-state, each opponent can be viewed as a series of systems. One way of looking at this is by using a model offered by Colonel John Warden. This model examines potential adversaries as a system of systems and serves to break down each system into its fundamental parts. This model is essentially a five-ringed bullseye, with the enemy's leadership in the center. Moving out from the center are the rings of systems essentials, infrastructure, population, and the enemy's fielded forces.<sup>8</sup>

Once you identify the adversary's system of systems, you can determine which nodes are critical to the system's functioning. The key is to apply parallel attack against these points to create a cascading deterioration in the enemy's ability to function as a system. This is ultimately achieved by recognizing the centers of gravity that lie at the core of the enemy's strategic system. In theory, the simultaneous attack of these points will result in paralyzing selected portions of the entire system. Once one achieves an acceptable degree of paralysis, the adversary would either have to accept your terms--i.e. the traditional Clausewitzian imposition of will--or suffer a more traditional and devastating annihilation.

The Gulf War gave us a glimpse into this form of war. A very primitive (by future standards) form of parallel attack was the core strategy from the outset of coalition hostilities. Iraq's military capabilities were systematically analyzed using the five-ringed model. Given the political aims of the war, critical nodes were identified that, when attacked in parallel, would produce quick strategic effects throughout the Iraqi system.<sup>9</sup> Recent technological advances in the areas of intelligence, stealth, and precision munitions provided the means of attacking these nodes. While the resulting degree of paralysis did not cause "the sword to fall from a paralyzed hand," it

did render Iraq's military virtually useless when coalition forces advanced in more traditional ways. Despite the follow-up use of sequential attack, the outcome of this conflict was decided by the overwhelming application of a limited parallel attack against a formidable enemy. The measure of paralysis inflicted on the Iraqi system suggests the potential implications of this new form of war in the years to come.

The primary way parallel attack was applied during the Gulf War was by air power, but it would be a mistake to equate air power alone with this form of war. Such a parochial view would unnecessarily limit the ultimate potential of parallel attack. Every viable means must be exploited and applied jointly to prevent a potential adversary from countering this new form of war.

The means employed to achieve paralysis in future conflict are as unlimited as man's ability to understand his environment and create new capabilities to interact with and manipulate it. Given the rapid pace of technological advancement, it would be meaningless to attempt to try to predict the types of capabilities that might be available to the commander. However, the source of power for the means to wage parallel attack will, no doubt, be information based. As stated by Alvin Toffler, "Information is the central resource of the third-wave. It is the oil of the future."<sup>10</sup> Information will simply alter our concept of time, space, and distance. Fueled by information, it is a given that there will be magnitudes of advances in virtually every conceivable area. What is less certain is whether we will fully grasp the paradigm shift from sequential to parallel attack and avoid the temptation to apply these advances in capabilities to old forms of war. Such a mistake would leave a tremendous opening for those who will seek more creative ways to achieve their objectives.

While sequential combat is identified with concentration, mass, and maneuver, parallel attack connotes a de-emphasis on mass, precision, and system-based targeting. The application of parallel attack will not recognize a linear definition of the battlefield, employ less destructive but



more lethal means, and blur the lines between the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war

**Clausewitz and the Essence of War** Paralysis, obtainable through the paradigm of parallel attack, will not constitute an end to the evolution of military theory. Adversaries will attempt to minimize their vulnerabilities and seek new ways to apply asymmetric force against a technologically superior foe, just as was done under sequential attack. Paralysis is, in actuality, the cousin to annihilation. In Clausewitzian terms, the discussion so far refers to “ideal” war waged under the emerging paradigm of parallel attack. “Real” war will yield to Clausewitz’s timeless concepts of complexity, fog and friction, commander’s genius, and the balancing of the trinity between the government, commander, and people.<sup>11</sup> The remainder of this essay will focus on paralyzing the enemy under real circumstances and attempt to venture beyond the current--and likely, temporary--United States’ monopoly of this form of war.

All of the factors that Clausewitz attributes to the difference between “ideal” and “real” war will not only continue in the realm of parallel attack, but will, in actuality, become even more relevant. Like sequential attack, parallel attack will be waged against a thinking adversary who will likely understand both his and our weaknesses and attempt to counter our actions. Defensively, he might corrupt our intelligence, acquire redundant capabilities, or, simply, refuse to abide by our standards of rationality and accept that his paralysis and inevitable doom warrant surrender. Offensively, he might seek to attack through anonymous acts, complicating our ability to determine how--and at whom--to strike back. Our most feared aspects of war (terrorism, blackmail, and use of WMD) will likely increase as a means to combat the effectiveness of paralysis.

The new paradigm of parallel attack will invalidate many of the axioms that seemed timeless in a linear world. However, Clausewitz’s revelations regarding the essence of war--with its ability

its ability to take on a chameleon-like character--will remain with us. War will likely become even more complicated under the new paradigm. All of this means that fog and friction, complexity, and the genius of the commander will continue to affirm that, "Everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult."<sup>12</sup>

Clausewitz defined the essence of war through a trinity composed of primordial violence and passion, chance and probability influenced by creativity, and instrument of policy subjected to reason alone.<sup>13</sup> He further stated that, "these three tendencies are like different codes of law, deep rooted in their subject and yet variable in their relationship to one another. A theory that ignores one of them seeks to fix an arbitrary relationship between them would conflict with reality to such an extent that for this reason alone it would be totally useless."<sup>14</sup> Clausewitz identifies the people, the commander, and the government as the pillars of this essence of war.

The success of paralysis will depend on the proper balance of this trinity. First, the will of the people remains critical. Parallel attack requires a higher level of peacetime commitment than does sequential attack. The speed in which one needs to attack and defend will not only require substantial resource allocations, but the people's willingness to accept a new set of ethical norms. Parallel attacks will all but eliminate the distinction between combatants and non-combatants, as well as between front and rear. It threatens to remove safe areas from the theater of operations intensifying uncertainty. Collateral damage, while less destructive in nature, will be just as lethal. Issues ranging from deception to unintended casualties resulting from globalization of world structures will all affect various aspects of the people's will to support future conflicts. Similarly, defense from parallel attack could limit or otherwise challenge individual freedoms and further strain the will of the people. The requirement to protect access to information will also require government involvement in areas now considered irrelevant to national security and thus in the

private domain in most democracies

The commander will also endure new challenges due to the unique aspects of parallel attack. First, his forces will likely operate globally, with diminished regional control. His dependence on national, vice theater, assets will complicate his ability to control his forces. Numerous agencies outside the DOD will assume even greater roles than they play today. Proper targeting of systems will require far more extensive coordination than presently required. The commander will also have to apply “genius” to a greatly increased array of options. Along with controlling the air, land, and sea, commanders will also have to contend with winning the information battle and controlling cyberspace. Domination of the entire electro-magnetic spectrum will also require careful planning and execution.<sup>15</sup> Finally, new tools like non-lethal weapons, unmanned systems, and real-time battle damage assessment will provide the commander with new avenues for complexity, fog and friction, and uncertainty to take its toll.

Finally, the government will likely not have the lead time to engage in lengthy debate of political objectives that was customary in democracies engaged in more traditional forms of warfare. Political objectives will have to contain clear end state guidance, as the military means to accomplish the objectives could be employed in multiple ways--ranging from destruction to temporary paralysis. Future conflicts might consist of a single continuous strike, leaving little room for reassessing political end states or intra-war bargaining. The idea of defending the US from parallel attack will also add a new dimension to national security. The statesman will have to accept that militarily weak adversaries, properly financed and skilled, could wage silent war by attacking such vulnerabilities as financial markets to computer networks.

The emerging paradigm shift from sequential to parallel attack will not invalidate Clausewitz's theories on the essence of war. However, it will provide the statesman and the

commander with a wider array of options in dealing with adversaries across the peace to war continuum. Those who fail to fully understand this unfolding revolutionary shift will likely find themselves at the mercy of those who have mastered it.

In summary, the linear paradigm that has dominated man's thinking is being replaced with a world where distance, speed, and time acquire new meaning. This new paradigm will offer a new form of war, relying on parallel rather than sequential actions. In this emerging form of war, the concepts of mass, concentration, and maneuver will be replaced by precision and systematic targeting. Ideally, one who masters this form of war will be able to quickly paralyze the adversary and achieve the enduring objective of breaking the opponent's will. However, the Clausewitzian timeless concepts of complexity, fog and friction, commander's genius, and the essence of war as described in the trinity will continue to define the nature, purpose, and conduct of war. Paralysis, while revolutionary in form, will ultimately not change the human essence of war.

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<sup>1</sup> Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973) 150-152.

<sup>2</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976) 577.

<sup>3</sup> Liddell B. H. Hart, *Strategy*, (New York: The First Meridian Printing Company, 1991) 212.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>5</sup> Haywood S. Hansell, Jr., *The Strategic Air War Against Germany and Japan*, (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1986) 54.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>7</sup> James Blackwell, Richard Blanchfield, Dale Hill, George Kraus, Fred Littlepage, and Jeffrey McKittrick, *The Revolution in Military Affairs, Battlefield of the Future: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Warfare Issues*, (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1995), 78.

<sup>8</sup> John A. Warden, III, *The Air Campaign: Planning for Combat*, (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1988), 9-11.

<sup>9</sup> Colin L. Powell, *My American Journey*, (New York: Random House, 1995), 473.

<sup>10</sup> Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War: Survival at the Dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993), 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> Clausewitz, 89.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>15</sup> Antulio J. Echevarria, II, "Dynamic Inter-Dimensionality," *Joint Force Quarterly* (Spring 1997) 32.

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